

Classical Political Thought

Vanguard University of Southern California

Class

Semester: Fall 2018

Room: Heath 104

Time: Wednesdays, 2:30-5:30

Units: 3

Department: History and Political Science

Instructor

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Course Description

Socrates of ancient Athens was responsible for bringing philosophy down from the heavens and into the city, making the eternal things present, in a face-to-face challenge to politics. For this, he was executed. Philosophy, after all, means a love of wisdom, but it is a wisdom that politics lacks the time and patience to understand. Philosophy doubts and asks questions for the sake of finding eternal truths, but what the political community needs is an Answer – an authoritative, unquestioned, divinely-approved law, or an ancestral custom that tells the people how to live. Besides, why seek the Truth when the city already knows what its own truth – especially when such questions might reveal that there is no Truth at all, but only a terrifying void? For this reason, philosophy was seen as the most dangerous and reckless activity people could ever engage in, worse than high treason or mass murder, since it left the wrongness of even those things in doubt. It was especially dangerous, though, when it is taught to the young, which is what Socrates did. But some of his young followers saw things differently. Plato and Aristotle recognized that philosophy actually had many good things to offer the city – *if* citizens were capable of receiving it. If they were educated to have well-ordered souls, to love what was good and true, and accustomed to living noble and upright lives of virtue, then philosophy was not a danger but the greatest gift the city could ever receive; it could be the capstone of their virtues, shape politics into justice, and become the highest activity of noble souls. What conditions make this possible? How can philosophers have the ear of the city, and when would philosophers be willing to address it? This course is devoted to the philosophy of Plato and his student Aristotle, and their attempts at answering those dilemmas. These ancient writings can allow the distant past can come to the rescue of the present: they can help us correct the unspoken assumptions of our own modern times, and help us see the good, the true and the beautiful as they are understood in themselves.

Required Texts

Students are required to have hard copies (not digital versions) of the following texts:

Plato. *The Republic*. Translated by Allan Bloom. Basic Books, 1991.

Aristotle. *Nicomachean Ethics*. Translated by Robert Bartlett and Susan D. Collins. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2012.

Recommended: Aristotle. *Politics*. Second Translated by Carnes Lord. Chicago: Chicago University Press, 2013.

Course Requirements and Grading

- **Participation and Reading Questions (20%).** Be prepared to answer reading questions in class, and answer minor research questions on classical philosophy and ancient Greece. Inability to answer will result in the loss of a participation point. Since the class is focused entirely on the texts and questions, you will not need a laptop.
- **Essay I (25%).** This is an essay on the first part of the course. There will be a prompt.
- **Essay II (30%).** This is an essay on the second part of the course. There will be a prompt.
- **Final Exam (25%).** This is a comprehensive exam on the texts and general themes of the class. There will be a study guide.

Disabilities

The Office of Disability Services provides reasonable accommodations for students with disabilities. If you have a temporary or permanent disability that requires classroom accommodations (this can include but not limited to; attention-related, learning, mental health, vision, hearing, physical or other health conditions), please contact The Office of Disability Services at 714-619-6550 or disabilityservices@vanguard.edu.

Writing Center

The Vanguard Writing Center is committed to helping undergraduate and graduate students in all disciplines. Students may bring any writing assignment to the center, where they will receive informed, thorough, one-on-one feedback from a peer consultant. The Writing Center can help students at any stage of the writing process, including: organizing notes, developing outlines, revising thesis statements, improving organization, or assisting with final editing. To book an appointment for a writing consultation, please visit vanguard.mywconline.com. To contact the writing center, email writingcenter@vanguard.edu or call (714) 966-6359.

Academic Integrity and Dishonesty policy

Academic dishonesty, either cheating or plagiarizing (presenting as one's own, the words or opinions of others), is regarded as a serious violation of both the academic and moral standards of VUSC. Full descriptions of the policies are in the University Catalog, pp. 59-61.

Course Schedule

Read the following passages from our texts on the days assigned.

August 29	Plato, <i>Apology of Socrates</i>
September 5	Plato, <i>Republic</i> , Book I; Interpretive Essay, pp. 307-337
September 12	Plato, <i>Republic</i> , Books II-III; Interpretive Essay, pp. 337-369
September 19	Plato, <i>Republic</i> , Books IV-V; Interpretive Essay, pp. 369-389
September 26	Plato, <i>Republic</i> , Books VI-VII; Interpretive Essay, pp. 389-412
October 3	Plato, <i>Republic</i> , Books VIII-IX; Interpretive Essay, pp. 412-434
October 10	Plato, <i>Republic</i> , Book X; Interpretive Essay, pp. 434-436
October 17	Aristotle, <i>Nicomachean Ethics</i> , Book I; Interpretive Essay, pp. 237-253
October 24	Aristotle, <i>Nicomachean Ethics</i> , Book II-III; Interpretive Essay, pp. 253-259
October 31	Aristotle, <i>Nicomachean Ethics</i> , Book III-IV; Interpretive Essay, pp. 259-246
November 7	Aristotle, <i>Nicomachean Ethics</i> , Book V; Interpretive Essay, pp. 270-280
November 14	Aristotle, <i>Nicomachean Ethics</i> , Book VI-VII; Interpretive Essay, pp. 280-287
November 21	Aristotle, <i>Nicomachean Ethics</i> , Book VIII-IX; Interpretive Essay, pp. 287-209
December 5	Aristotle, <i>Nicomachean Ethics</i> , Book X; Interpretive Essay, pp. 294-302